

Если вы не прошли конкурс, не теряйте лицо, не отчаивайтесь, лучше спросите, чего не хватило для победы, где и какие ошибки вы совершили.

Не выговаривайте сотрудникам фирмы всё, что вы о них думаете. Лучше спросите, можно ли в следующий раз прийти на собеседование. Держите связь с компанией и её рекрутером. Помните, что на ошибках учатся. Важно, что вы приобрели опыт, извлекли определённые уроки и в следующий раз у вас всё обязательно получится.

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ЧТЕНИЕ АУТЕНТИЧНЫХ ТЕКСТОВ: РАЗВИТИЕ СИНТЕТИЧЕСКОГО И АНАЛИТИЧЕСКОГО НАВЫКОВ РАБОТЫ С ТЕКСТОМ

DEVELOPING TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP PROCESSING SKILLS READING AUTHENTIC TEXTS

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Аннотация: Статья рассматривает процесс чтения на иностранном языке с точки зрения психологического, социокультурного и других аспектов, а так же проблемы развития синтетического и аналитического навыков чтения аутентичных текстов.

Ключевые слова: чтение, виды чтения, теория схем, синтетический подход, аналитический подход, чтение аутентичных текстов, обучение английскому как иностранному.

Abstract: This article looks at the process of reading from psychological, socio-cultural and other perspectives as well as discovers more about its practical implications.

Keywords: reading, reading sub-skills, schema theory, top-down approach, bottom-up approach, reading authentic texts, EFL.

Reading is a basic literacy skill we acquire in early childhood in L1 (so in ESL/EFL we do not need to teach people to read we need to help them do it in a foreign language) and is often taken for granted, i.e. texts are normally a means of looking at the language or developing productive skills rather than a means in itself. The reasons are obvious to name just two. Texts do give a teacher an excellent opportunity to have a written record of the TL to refer to and represent a source of exposure to the language, what we aim at in our efforts to provide comprehensible input. Most modern coursebooks treat texts in this way and become only a way of learning rather than pleasure or interest for students.

At the same time, for academics and university students, reading in a foreign language is vital. ‘The combination of our daily encounters with texts and our needs to read in different ways in educational and professional settings requires that we read differently depending on the context and our goals (and motivations).

When we read for different purposes, we engage in many types of reading, particularly in academic settings.’[3]

These implications resulted in this article on reading authentic texts employing top-down and bottom-up processing in particular.

What is reading?

Reading is an extremely complex process and is defined differently by authors. ‘Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print’ [10], or, ‘Comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known.’[7]

Overview of research on reading given by David E. Eskey [1] allows to trace back the attitudes to this receptive skill from 1960s (when then dominant behaviorist models could not accommodate discussion of reading as a mental event) to these days. In the late 1970s reading was considered a passive skill, whereas 1980s were revolutionized by a ‘top-down model’ (‘from brain to text’ as opposed to ‘from text to brain’) which was challenged in late 1980s by proponents of ‘interactive’ model. Since then reading has been treated as a psycholinguistic process and is being explored in its socio-cultural dimension, and even beyond this: in neurobiology. Yet other studies focus on the nature of reading in the rapidly expanding electronic media.

Consequently, in terms of implications for teaching we now see reading as an active, even interactive process. Goodman [2] called it ‘psycholinguistic guessing game’, ‘the dynamic relationship with a text as the reader ‘struggles’ to make sense of it.’[5] Learners not only decode the information on the letter, then

word, after that grammatical structures and sentence level (called *bottom-up processing*), but use their experience and existing knowledge of the topic (*schemata*) to predict, interpret and even question the content (*top-down processing*).

Reading for different purposes

We read for different purposes, and we read differently depending whether it is a newspaper, a recipe, a telephone directory, etc. Pugh, Lunzer and Gardner described various styles of reading and their terminology for these has been taken into ELT methodology:

- Skimming is used to get a global impression of the content of the text, for example when we look through a newspaper and to decide whether we want to read an article or not we focus only on the headings and first lines of paragraphs. It is used by teachers to increase reading speed and fluency because learners are encouraged not to read every word to discover the main idea or answer a general question (e.g. *Where does it take place?*)
- Scanning is used to find specific information in the text. As Scrivener [8] puts it ‘move your eyes quickly over a text to locate a specific piece of information (e.g. a name, address, fact, price, number, date, etc) without reading the whole text or unpacking any subtleties of meaning.’ It is another way to promote reading speed and fluency. The typical question would be *What time does the train arrive?*
- Intensive reading involves reading for detail, i.e. looking closely and carefully at the text in order to gain understanding of as much detail as possible. To be able to do this learners usually need to go back to the text several times to find out information and make sure they have interpreted the words correctly. More often than not it is based on coursebook short texts rather than authentic material.
- Extensive reading is mainly done for pleasure, but for EFL classes a lot of teacher effort is needed to motivate students to read outside the classroom.

Schema theory

A schema (plural *schemata*) is a mental structure. Nuttall [7: 7] considers that ‘it is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experience, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had. It is a structure because it

is organized; it includes the relationships between its component parts.’ When we read a text the words and phrases it contains activate our prior knowledge about them and we interpret them based on this knowledge and try to comprehend what the writer intends. Whether we do this successfully depends on the similarities between the writer’s and reader’s schemata, thus texts containing unfamiliar cultural information represent a higher reading challenge than texts sharing one’s own culture. We combine information from the text (writer’s schemata) and our schemata, which results into a ‘dialogue’ and makes reading an interactive process. An important issue is whether you (the reader) are more interested in the author’s opinion or your own interpretation.

For an EFL learner who obviously more often than not does not share the same background as a writer reading authentic texts is a real challenge. Does that mean that we should not bring them into the classroom and use only specially written ‘prescribed’ ones? No, on the contrary, one of our main aims is to get the learners read real-life texts.

It is sometimes argued though, that there exist enough psychological data to question whether top-down guidance of comprehension is as tight as schema theory suggests. Despite this fact schema theory is indispensable for EFL classes.

Top-down and bottom-up approaches

In Grammar-Translation methodology many of us are a product of, it was assumed that in order to understand the whole text, we must first understand its parts (words, sentences, etc). However, it is not always the case; we do not need to grasp every word to be able to read a newspaper article, for example. There are two terms used to describe these approaches to reading: top-down and bottom-up processing.

Top-down strategies focus on the big picture, Nuttall [7:16] compares this approach to ‘an eagle’s eye view of the landscape. From a great height, the eagle ... understands the nature of the whole terrain, its general pattern and relationships between various parts of it.’ This is where we use our schemata to predict, make assumptions and inferences. We consider the text as a whole from the perspective of our knowledge and experience.

Bottom-up strategies, on the other hand, focus on detail and involve intensive reading. Nuttall’s [7: 17] image of it is ‘a scientist with a magnifying glass examining the ecology of a transect – a tiny part of the landscape the eagle surveys.’ This is where we use our language knowledge to decode letters, words, grammatical structures and other language features of the text.

Fluent readers (as most of us are in L1) do that quickly, accurately and automatically; and this is what we aim at as L2 teachers and learners.

When we read in our L1, we probably employ mostly top-down strategies, but in L2, it is quite likely to be the other way round. However, it is quite difficult to separate the two approaches because in practice we continually shift from one to the other. This is what has become known as *interactive* reading. The reader, sometimes subconsciously, decides which strategy to use depending on the reason for reading and in proportions that seem reasonable.

Teachers use both approaches: we do want our students to get a clear general picture activating schemata, but it is not normally our final goal, we also want them to be able to fill in each other's information gaps (e.g. jigsaw reading).

Reading authentic texts

‘Authentic material is language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers. It is normal, natural language used by native or competent speakers of a language. This is what our students encounter ... in real life if they come into contact with target-language speakers ... it is unlikely to be simplified or spoken slowly.’[4]

It is a real dilemma for EFL teachers whether to use composed (specially written) or authentic texts (written for English-speaking community not the classroom). The former seems more useful for lower level learners, whereas the latter for high level learners. The major problem with authentic material is the language complexity.

Authentic material is an excellent opportunity to push the boundaries and show our learners that there is ‘life’ out there and that they can cope with it however undoable a real-life text might seem at the start.

Practical implications

An ordinary classroom activity as it is, reading can pose a range of problems for our learners. Many of them are very often resistant to authentic texts because of their complexity (syntax, lexical and grammatical cohesion, ellipses, discourse, etc.); even familiar words do not help.

A useful rule of thumb is if otherwise suitable text seems too difficult, you can exploit it by means of tasks which do not demand detailed understanding and make more use of top-down strategies. Experience and intelligence count more than language proficiency in prediction activities (from the title, headings, pictures, etc.) as well as general comprehension questions, that usually help learners to accept the fact that they can do the task without going into too much detail.

However, detailed work is possible. For example, teachers get their students infer meaning of potentially unknown words from context or the ones they find most problematic to cope with the task. This is normally a list of six to eight words maximum not to end up doing a systems lesson. A crucial thing is to support and praise students' efforts even if they get things wrong. Scaffolding can take various forms, from prompting to clarifying and explaining, although teachers should try to involve students in peer-teaching more not to be the only resource of correct answers.

Another issue we have to face is learners making efforts to understand every word in a given text. This problem is closely connected with the previous one. However surprising that may sound, but we still have to teach our, even higher level learners, reading for gist. It is not rare to see a university academic, who in real life undoubtedly skim very well in their L1, and who seems to lose this skill in the English language classroom and try to understand every single word. The idea that some parts of a text may be ignored or skipped is not an easy thing to accept for such learners.

First, teachers need to be selective with both graded and authentic texts and choose them bearing in mind their so called 'exploitability'.

Second, pre-teaching key lexis helps to reduce part of stress, and if combined with setting time limits to do the task, results into students becoming more confident and managing to cope with authentic material successfully without understanding every word.

Third, we live in a digital age. This is not unusual to see students using on-line/in-built dictionaries. Older generation tend to have a hard copy (often outdated). They sometimes over-rely on dictionaries and feel deprived having to deal with texts without one, 'the repository of final linguistic authority', according to Alan Maley [10]. Although dictionary is not an evil in itself and can be a powerful and useful tool in some circumstances, students need to be taught how and when to use it. From my experience, carefully devised dictionary-based lessons help learners prioritize new vocabulary and contextualize it. However, it is better to advise students against dictionaries in a reading lesson making them aware that looking up words is not the way we read outside the classroom in real life and they can cope without one. They are persuaded when they get used to top-down strategies: prediction, skimming, etc.

In addition, students do not always share the same socio-cultural knowledge with authentic material writers. It can be a source of ongoing worry throughout the lesson and some students may even lose interest in the text at all. These issues

should be dealt with before reading. A short discussion activating schemata results in at least one person who can share their experiences and knowledge. It does not need to be a sufficient explanation. Other students' motivation to read is stronger 'if there are mysteries to solve and clues to look for'. [7: 156] Otherwise some visuals or a short video to give the learners an idea normally helps, on very rare occasions a teacher can even explain something making sure they elicit rather than tell.

As far as extensive reading is concerned, it always makes more fluent readers. It is now recognized that reading itself is the means of acquiring the extensive vocabulary required for reading widely in a second language.' School teachers can set up a library or organize an extensive reading programme to form their learners' preferences in reading in their L1 and have varied interests.

However, older people e.g. academics, sometimes seek their teacher's advice. They read extensively in their field of study and need to build up and expand their general English vocabulary. On-line newspaper sites and hobby-related Internet resources that add up to their fields of interest will maintain the desire to read in a foreign language.

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